

The Grapevine



Newsletter of the Finchley Horticultural Society

WINTER 22/23

*From The Darkling Thrush
by Thomas Hardy*

*...The ancient pulse of germ and birth
Was shrunken hard and dry,
And every spirit upon earth
Seemed fervourless as I.*

*At once a voice arose among
The bleak twigs overhead
In a full-hearted evensong
Of joy illimited;*

*An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
Upon the growing gloom.*

*So little cause for carolings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around,
That I could think there trembled through
His happy good-night air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware.*



Blessed hope is indeed what we need for 2023. With so many things going wrong in the world, we are lucky to have our allotments that take our minds off problems, allow us to concentrate on something positive, feel the joy of growing or just weeding, spending more time outdoors, seeing friends, sharing good moments and ideas, going on trips. Also, remembering others who are no longer with us, but who have helped make our allotments a little oasis of happiness.

This winter is the warmest on record, despite the sudden brief outburst of snow and ice in the middle of December. It is also one of the wettest, with rain almost a daily event. This makes it harder to tend our soggy plots. Still, there are things we can do now, to prepare for the time when planting can resume.

- Spend some time now planning your plot, making a quick sketch of what you want to plant and where.
- Keep harvesting winter greens – kale, spinach, chard, and mustard leaves as well as sprouts.
- Keep turning the compost and checking the netting hasn't blown away.
- Cut autumn-fruiting raspberries right back to the ground if you haven't already done so.
- Come February, order seed potatoes so that you can start chitting them ready to plant. If the ground isn't too hard, you can start preparing beds for your potatoes – it is worth then covering them with black polythene to warm the soil ahead of planting in March.

Ten simple steps to healthier soil

(Inspired by Rocket Gardens Nursery)

The start of a new year is a good time to focus on the importance of looking after the soil in our plots. Taking the necessary steps now will make a huge difference to the plants themselves, as well as to the worms and other soil organisms right along the food chain.

1. **Add plenty of organic matter** – this is the best way to put nutrients back into the soil. Choose leaf mould mulch, organic compost, or well-rotted manure.



2. **Mulch/cover bare soil** – bare soil exposed to the elements is quickly affected by frost, snow, rain, sun etc. Mulch empty beds in your plot with compost/well-rotted manure or cover them (e.g. with cardboard or a sheet of polythene that can be removed when you are ready to plant).

3. **Go no-dig** – leaving the soil as undisturbed as possible allows the underground network of creatures and fungi to do their thing. This is why ‘no-dig’ works so well. Rather than digging over the soil before planting, simply cover it generously with mulch each season leaving the soil underneath untouched (see the article on No-dig Potatoes in the Spring 2021 issue of the Grapevine*).

4. **Don't use weedkiller** – it will quickly destroy things, including beneficial bacteria in the soil. If weeds abound and you don't have enough time to keep on top of them, investigate ‘no-dig’ as an alternative way to keeping them down, or plant through biodegradable ‘plastic’ alternatives like corn starch weed block if you are short of time. Or invest in a few bags of Strulch which can really help to keep weeds at bay.



5. **Don't use pesticides** – try companion planting instead (see the article on Companion Planting in the Spring 2021 issue of the Grapevine*). The best solution is a combination of companion plants, insect proof netting, strong jets of water from the hose (for aphids), beer traps for slugs and a few other handy little tricks whilst being prepared to tolerate some damage.
6. **Keep your plot tidy** – old plastic plant pots/labels, bits of garden string and so on can quickly be torn to shreds by the wind, rain etc, and the smaller they get the easier it is for them to get lost in the soil.
7. **Make (and use!) your own compost** (see the article on Eric's Composting Workshop in the Autumn 2022 issue of the Grapevine*).
8. **Grow year round** – keeping your plot planted up all year round is the best option as it is not good for soil to be exposed directly to the elements. If you're short on time/energy in the winter months, just planting up lots of spinach, chard, kale and broccoli in autumn can be a brilliant way to grow – it involves minimal effort, and you can happily leave them all growing outdoors untended and just enjoy using all the leaves in early spring.
9. **Grow lots of different things** – be sure to grow lots of flowers, some trees if you can even if they are dwarf varieties, as well as all your veggies. The more the merrier as it attracts different creatures – bugs, birds, bees, moles, worms and so on – which all play their part in the eco-system and affect soil health.
10. **Rotate crops** – you don't have to rigidly follow a crop rotation system to help your soil – simply growing different plants in different parts of the plot each season will be enough to help keep nutrients balanced in the soil.

*All articles available on our website www.finchleyhs.org/newsletters



Tributes to June Brookes

At the end of last year, we said goodbye to one of the FHS and Gordon Road allotments' greats, their heart and soul, June Brookes, who died at the age of 92 on 1 December. June was wonderfully warm, cheerful, energetic, full of life. She was very welcoming to newcomers and worked tirelessly to make our allotments a wonderful place to be. Here are some fond memories and photos of June, kindly shared by our members.

Beverley Perkins:

It was with great sadness that Dave and I learned that June had passed away on 1 December. June and I were neighbours for more than 30 years, friends for over 40 years and joint plot holders for nearly 25 years. We started small with one plot between us, but then acquired more plots with space for fruit trees, a greenhouse, a shed and a proper fruit cage. We gradually became more and more involved in the running of the allotments, the shop, the Plant Sale, and other social events, which June continued to help organising after we moved down to Devon in 2013. She came to visit us every year (until Covid struck) and we greatly looked forward to her visits and hearing about what was going on at Gordon Road. We have many happy memories of her, miss her hugely and remember her with deep affection.



Felicity Nock:

June was a presence to be reckoned with at Gordon Road.

The first time I remember June was not on site but via a brave friend who had offered her garden as my very first design. Jill and June were companions in a group of walkers who toured London, getting to know its nooks, crannies, and little-known architectural gems. It didn't matter to either of them that many gems they saw each year they'd already seen before - they were there for the bright banter, chat, and a laugh.

June's background was in travel, and she really hit the glory days of the Travel Agent. In retirement she made best use of her knowledge and contacts to travel widely. Once the plot invoices had gone out in late winter, all secretarial work stopped as June swanned off to cruise the Caribbean (her favourite) and dine out at the captain's table.

On site, June knew everyone personally. As the FHS Secretary she was the liaison between the Main Committee and the Allotment Committee and helped to see many projects to completion. She valued the FHS link to BAF and steered me with precision to help her pick up armfuls of silverware and eventually cajole me to take on the role of a competition judge. At individual level she saw the plot rentals through the lens of the health and wellbeing of the people who tended the soil, allowing leeway here for illness or consideration there for family matters. Annually, she showed her combined love of plants and chat when she, Claudine, Catherine, and Christine would hunker down in the autumn to plan the Plant Sale and the whole preparation would unfurl before them from February to May.

Latterly, she shared her own plot with Melanie Briffitt and then Munira Grainger. They made formidable teams, a showcase of allotment keeping in combination with June's favourite orchard trees, water-lily pond, and croaking frog alerts.



Melanie Briffitt:

As I sit here writing my memories of June, I think we all remember how kind, friendly and extremely chatty June was. She was a natural born organiser who loved to help organise the events held at Gordon Road, from the Plant Sales to ordering stock for the shop and as she had built her career in the travel agency business and had travelled the world extensively, she loved to help organise the coach trips. Behind the scenes June did so much more than we as plot holders would ever realise.

June gave me my first plot many years ago and after moving down to South London, I felt I had to give it up but missed it terribly. June had shared a plot with Beverly for many years but with a move to Devon, June was then left to manage the plot alone. It was at the Plant Sale when she persuaded me to come back and share with her; she was very persuasive! I agreed to drive up and down, we'd chat on the car phone on every journey about what we'd do that day, with June writing a list ready for when I'd arrive.

Me, being the stronger one, was put to work clearing the plot, obviously under great direction from June. She'd be very clear as to how it should look and what we should grow. Each season, she'd sit in the Piggery with her note pad and browse through the Kings' Catalogue looking for something unusual to grow and plotting where everything should be planted. She was the 'Greenhouse Director' as I called her, she loved that title, and was at her best sowing seeds and nurturing them.

June became a very close friend and I miss her dearly but glad to have such lovely memories of her.



Leni Green:

June was a cat person (like me!). She adored Gordon, the orange tabby who roams round the allotment, and made sure he was well fed and well caressed. I thought she was feeding him too well, given that his circumference was increasing, but June wouldn't have it. 'Oh, no, not sweet Gordon,' she said, bending down to stroke him. I'm sure Gordon will have a vacancy in his heart for June.

*

Pricking out lettuces for the Plant Sale several years ago, I managed to bend my little finger back, tearing a ligament. 'I never knew lettuces could be so dangerous,' quipped June.

Penny Igoe:

I met June when I was offered my plot at Nethercourt, some years ago. She was very kind to me, and we hit it off immediately. We shared a love of cruising and we always had something to talk about. Whenever I saw her, which wasn't often, sadly, we always had a laugh and a chat. She was a lovely lady and is much missed.

Christine Williams:

June was great fun to work with when helping with the plant sale. She loved travel and culture. We had both worked in the travel industry and we would chat about her wonderful cruises and places she had visited.

When June retired from the committee, we discovered just how many things she did for the Society. As secretary, she would deal with plot lettings, organising social events and numerous other jobs. She knew all the plot holders and would always find time to chat with everyone; often doing her best to drum up enthusiasm for volunteer help on the site. She was always a cheerful and positive presence on the Committee and is sorely missed by us all.



Ann & Andrew Brown:

We were very sad to hear of June's death. She was so lovely to work with in running the allotments, and always soldiered on cheerfully through times good and times challenging.

Jo Cuttell:

I always knew when June was on the allotment because her little maroon mini would be parked nearby. It was one of the original minis and it was tiny and somehow, she kept it going for over thirty years.

June told us stories about her holiday cruises when we stopped for a chat on the allotments - she loved travelling and seeing new places - but she also loved the fun of a cruise, dressing up for dinner and dancing.

I don't know how many years she was on the Allotment Committee, and she had so many jobs. She oversaw all the invoicing for plot rents until recently, she ran the Trading Hut and organised the social events. She supported Claudine in running the FHS, and when the allotments became self-managing, she took on the role of Trustee to ensure the Society was properly run.

The main thing that impressed me about June was that she knew everyone on the allotments; she talked to us all and knew who needed help and support. She was always ready to listen and to help sort out problems.

We miss her.



CONGRATULATIONS TO BAF WINNERS!

Barnet Allotment Federation

Competitions Prize Giving

15th November 2022

Rathbone Allotments

Kirstie Burgin, Vice Chair

Isobel Excell, Competitions Secretary

Julie Dean, Publicity

Anita Gracie from Lawrence Street Allotments,
a judge of the BAF competitions and 'Islington in Bloom'

Our Results

Medium Site: 1st Place - Gordon Road

Small Site: 2nd Place - Brent Way

Small Site: 3rd Place - Nethercourt Avenue



The evening began with shared food and a chance to catch up before Kirstie and Isobel opened the meeting with an introduction to Anita Gracie. Anita stands with one foot in Barnet (Lawrence Street) where she is a moderating judge for the BAF Awards and one in Islington where she works for <https://www.octopuscommunities.org.uk/> and judges for Islington in Bloom.

Behind her careful comparison of the two boroughs in terms of green spaces (Barnet boasts four times more space per person than Islington) lay a firm recommendation: Barnet must learn from her sister borough where green space is at a premium. Many people in Islington, especially those in social housing, have no access to personal green space. The Octopus Community provides plots and guides for residents wishing to join gardening ventures in public and community gardens. Their watchwords are: engage, motivate, inspire, equip and support. They work closely with <https://inspiringsustainableislington.org/>, an initiative that promotes the benefits of sustainability, clean air, nurture, and nature for residents.



By contrast, in Barnet, just because we have space it does not necessarily mean that we use it responsibly. We may be squandering an opportunity. If we think carefully about this, we should really value our 44 allotments for the benefit they bring to the wider community as well as ourselves as individuals. To highlight and promote the connection between space and well-being for Barnet residents, Anita strongly suggested that the Competition rules be reviewed. Instead of focusing on fine gardening, neat edges, and weed-free plots we should be encouraging 'forest gardening' and highlighting community activities such plant sharing, workshops to teach the joy of gardening, equal access and all avenues to greater sustainability.

This was a heart-felt plea that the BAF Competition should not just be about handing out silverware (lovely though it is to have won our awards) but that the awards should promote networks and new ways of thinking about our green spaces to benefit our neighbours, our community and ourselves in equal measure.

The FHS was very fortunate to win its three awards which shows that we really care for our three allotments, but this year's most coveted Ted Green Award for Communal Endeavours went to Brook Farm. Come on, the FHS! We already have the Plant Sale, inclusive raised beds, schools on site and the Food Bank. We're on the right path - we must shout it out - but can we do more? Let's spend the winter planning and really consider how we can enhance our community and extend our networks to share the life-giving power of good gardening!

Felicity Nock

Christmas Lunch

This year's Christmas lunch on 4 December at Gordon Road was a huge success. Despite the cold weather, there was a good turnout with plenty of seasonal dishes to try. Thanks to everyone who helped make this a very enjoyable occasion.



Plant Sale 2023

You may remember our message last year seeking help for our annual May Plant Sale. Sadly, we have lost members with growing and organising skills; their knowledge and commitment are much missed.

We need to get as many people as possible to help with the jobs that need doing for the Plant Sale.



They include:

- Filling pots with compost
- Writing labels
- Sowing and growing on seedlings
- Watering
- Moving trays of plants
- Helping Catherine with potting on perennials
- Organising a raffle
- Sign making
- Helping to organise the day
- Labelling stock the day before the sale

The initial meeting to discuss the needs, potential roles, and ascertain interest was held on Sunday 15 January at the Gordon Road site. Christine Williams and Catherine Schmitt who have been

managing the whole process of the Plant Sale for many years, explained the main requirements and outlined the range of tasks and the timeline for doing them. Several people put their names down for sowing seeds through to growing plants ready for the Plant Sale, while others offered help on an on-and-off basis. A WhatsApp group is being set up for all those who want to be part of the process. It will allow volunteers to see what is required and when, and step in if they can spare some time.

There are many jobs to be done, times are flexible, and every offer of help is welcome. If you are interested, please contact us on finchleyhorticulturalsociety@gmail.com.

After the Plant Sale volunteer helpers will be able to use space in the poly tunnel, to grow on their own plants.

Piggery Canopy Project

Plans are afoot to make shreds of blue plastic straw flying from the Piggery a distant memory! The canopy structure, rotten and unsafe beyond repair, is due for replacement and we're sure that few allotment holders will miss its billowing blue tarpaulin.



For almost a year a team from the Committees have been planning the construction of a fine new canopy. Many alternative open frame constructions have been considered and checked with landscapers: from a wooden pergola type structure with 'sail' canopy to a more contemporary powder coated aluminium with a fixed, translucent roof. This long-life fixed roof has been critical in persuading the team to make their choice.

In planning such a central meeting space for the community the team has also focussed on accessibility for all. The first phase of the project will be to extend the paved paths across the entire area under the canopy creating a stable, weed-free floor (no more chores of topping up the woodchip!). The work is due to start soon (late January – early February), and we will let you know closer to the time when the builders are arriving on site. The canopy will follow, as we wait another 11 weeks for the custom-built structure to be engineered and delivered.

The renovation will make the Piggery a great place to meet, eat and chat - anticipate a barbecue fiesta this summer to celebrate the new Piggery!

Notices

WATER ON THE ALLOTMENTS

Water at Gordon Road has been switched off except in the Green Room. All taps around the site have been turned on, this is to prevent damage from frost. Please do not turn them off.

We need a couple of volunteers to turn the water off on our allotments in November each year, before the first frosts, and to turn it back on again in spring. It is not an onerous job but each tap on site needs to be left open in the winter to avoid fluctuations in water pressure, and then closed again as they are turned back on in the spring. If you could help, please get in touch with the FHS Committee by e-mail finchleyhorticulturalsociety@gmail.com.

ARE YOU A KEEN GARDENER?

Keen gardeners may be interested in joining Totteridge Garden Club.
<http://www.totteridgegardenclub.co.uk/>

They have a meeting each month except August and December in the Village Hall in Badgers Croft which is just off Totteridge Lane. Plenty of parking. They also have a Saturday coach outing occurring each month from April to October. Sometimes two gardens are visited in one day or one garden is seen in the afternoon after the morning has been spent in an interesting town nearby. There are occasional other outings to Christmas Fairs, race meetings and other events.

The club have a forthcoming 5-day trip to the Gardens & Historic Houses of Yorkshire, departing on 22 May. Visits include Renisaw Hall and Gardens, Markenfield Hall, Newby Hall Gardens, Skipton, Bolton Abbey and much more. Travel is by Executive coach and the cost of £577 includes half board accommodation.

For more information, please contact Pauline Delius on 020 8883 7041.

RAISED BEDS

There are raised beds available for people with disabilities on the Gordon Road site of Finchley Horticultural Society.

Please contact Sylvia at fhsplotapplications@gmail.com and come and have a look at one. There is some parking near the raised beds.

APPLE AND PEAR TREE PRUNING WORKSHOP

11am Sunday 5th February, Gordon Road Allotments

Everything you wanted to know about pruning apple and pear trees but were afraid to ask. It will be run by Leslie Wertheimer of the London Orchard Project who ran a very popular and successful stone fruit pruning course last autumn.

No need to book, just turn upon the day. Please bring £5 in cash as a donation to the London Orchard Project.

OUR AGM MEETING

Our next AGM meeting is going to be held at 7 pm on 21 March at the Brent Way Tennis Club. Please come and take part in the discussions and help shape our allotments' future.

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For all Finchley gardeners and for plot
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Member of the Barnet Federation of
Allotment and Horticultural Societies
Affiliated to the
Royal Horticultural Society

Events Diary

RHS Winter Events:

Celebrate the best of the season
at the RHS Gardens

Wisley: *Deep Sea Dive*
(4 February-12 March)

Bridgewater: *Houseplant Weekend*
(28-29 January)
Introduction to Garden Design
(21 January)

Harlow Carr: *Houseplant Habitation*
(4-12 February)

Rosemoor : *Winter Sculpture Exhibition*
(until 31 January)
Celebration of Snowdrops
(1-12 February)

Look out for on-sale dates in the members' e-
newsletter or visit rhs.org.uk/shows



Newsletter

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